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Take Hold of Your Business Success

Posted By [Heather Boerner](#) On April 29, 2009 @ 12:08 pm In [Entrepreneurs](#) | [1 Comment](#)



Talent, hard work, even vision will only get you part of the way to success. To go the distance, cultivate these surprising traits that draw investors, attract great employees and inspire.

Secret #1: Faith

For some entrepreneurs, literal faith in God gives them the courage and tenacity to stick with their vision despite setbacks. But for almost all successful entrepreneurs, faith is hard won.

Not long ago, St. Louis-based [Kwame Building Group](#) ^[1], which provides construction management for public and private infrastructure projects, was involved in a \$100 million lawsuit brought after a train extension project ran over budget. In the end, Kwame was found without fault. But in the four years of the suit, Kwame CEO and founder Tony Thompson says his company shed 25 employees and spent \$6 million on defense. If he lost, it would have bankrupted the company and Thompson personally.

"I had to make some tough decisions very quickly and continue to market and stay active in the community with charitable organizations and boards while traveling the country developing new business," he says.

Doing that took faith in himself, his employees, and his company's practices. It paid off: 2008 was Kwame's best year in its 17-year history, and Thompson says the experience of working lean and under financial stress prepared his company for the current economy. "I am what this economy needs," he says firmly.

"It's almost analogous to guts, but it's more than guts—it's what made me stand up as the only black guy in a room of CEOs and fight for my life in the middle of litigation," he says. "You have to have total and complete confidence in your ability to succeed."

Secret #2: Humility

It's one thing to trust your vision. It's quite another to insist on it rigidly, says Darrell Freeman, founder and chairman of Nashville-based [Zycron Information Technology Services and Solutions](#) ^[2], which provides IT staffing, outsourcing, and project development to Fortune 500 companies.

Freeman walks his talk.

Founded in 1991 with \$2,000 in personal savings, Zycron has grown to a \$20 million-a-year company. Still, Freeman stepped aside and appointed executive vice president Steven Howard Smith to the role of president and CEO this year. He believed Smith was better at company management than him, and the company has maintained the growth to back up his assertion. At the time, he told the Nashville Business Journal that "more small business owners should move their egos out of the way and turn the reigns over to a seasoned veteran."

"If I'm the smartest guy in the room, that's a problem," he says. "When you have a big ego, it can hurt business because people are afraid of you, so they aren't telling you information you need to get ahead. They're afraid to tell you messed up with a customer. If you don't know, you can't correct it."

Secret #3: Optimism

You may be shaking in your loafers and heels as you watch the stock market wobble, but you can still cultivate a positive outlook that reassures current clients and attracts new ones.

In fact, a positive outlook might make your business nimbler, says Maurice B. Tosé, founder and CEO of multi-million dollar TeleCommunication Systems, a Maryland-based provider of wireless data products and services to the public, government, and carriers.

"The world could be crumbling around me, but how am I doing? Never better," he says. "When you're positive, you're looking for the answer, not worrying about the mistakes."

Aba Kwawu brings a "sunny disposition" to [The Aba Agency](#) ^[3], her seven-year-old boutique public relations firm. She specializes in high-end beauty, fashion and entertainment brands including DeBeers, Cirque du Soleil and Fashion Week Miami—brands that might be tempted to cut publicity until the economy stabilizes.

But Kwawu has retained clients by explaining how they can use this economy to promote their brand. For luxury brands, that often means reminding consumers that high-quality outlasts shoddy, cut-rate products.

"The way I see it, this is a great opportunity for many of us—not just my clients but myself," she says. "What's happening in the market now is a return to what's really valuable and high-quality. That's what consumers are looking for and that's what the client is looking for."

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[1] **Kwame Building Group:** <http://www.kwamebuildinggroup.com/>

[2] **Zycron Information Technology Services and Solutions:** <http://www.zycron.com/about.html>

[3] The Aba Agency: <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/dir/aba/kwawu>

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